

Friday, May 23, 2008

Dear Friends:

So much of what schools do is based on trust. Not only must kids trust their teachers, but parents have to trust those teachers, too. And schools have to earn that trust each and every day.

Trust is what South Carolina's new Darkness to Light initiative, announced last week, is all about. The South Carolina Department of Education has joined forces with a national nonprofit group to provide training for state educators on how to prevent improper relationships with students.

Last year Attorney General Henry McMaster, Department of Social Services Director Kathleen Hayes, and I convened a statewide task force to address the issue of educator misconduct. One of the group's recommendations concerned a training component for educators.

As many as 10,000 South Carolina teachers, administrators, guidance counselors and school nurses will initially participate in the award-winning "Stewards of Children" program developed by Darkness to Light, a national nonprofit headquartered in Charleston. The training will begin in July, with the possibility of additional educators participating after the first group completes the curriculum. And while the partnership covers training for public school teachers, private schools will also be invited to participate.

"Stewards of Children" is an evidence-based, third-party evaluated program that was the 2007 recipient of the National Crime Prevention Association's Crime Prevention Program of the Year award. The goal of the training will be to show educators how to prevent child sexual abuse, how to recognize it, and how to react responsibly when they find it.

Under the new collaboration with Darkness to Light, the Education Department will have each South Carolina school district identify a facilitator who will be trained in the organization's "Stewards of Children" curriculum. That person will serve as the district's "resident expert" who trains local educators, ensures compliance and enhancement of child safety practices and leads a response team when abuse is suspected or reported.

The statewide Task Force on Adult Sexual Misconduct in Schools continues to meet to determine future initiatives aimed at ridding schools of sexual exploitation and misconduct. Our training initiative with Darkness to Light is a good start, but we have to do more.

Incidents of misconduct involve only a tiny fraction of our teaching force, but even one incident is one too many. We've got to stay vigilant for our children's sake.

Sincerely,

Jim Rex
State Superintendent of Education

http://www.darkness2light.org/AboutUs/about_us.asp

<http://www.scattorneygeneral.com/index.html>

<http://www.state.sc.us/dss/>

<http://www.darkness2light.org/prevention/stewards-of-children/>

<http://www.ed.sc.gov/>